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ABSTRACT

An evaluation of teacher attitudes toward a public schools career ladder program is presented. Survey questionnaires mailed to 3,239 administrators, nonprogram teachers, and participating teachers elicited 1,683 returns for a 52 percent response rate. Findings indicate that the majority of teachers favored continuation of the career ladder program. Strongest supporters were teachers in grades K-9, administrators, teachers with fewer years' teaching experience, and program participants. No consensus existed on the desirability of four alternative compensation plans. Favorable attitudes expressed by both career ladder and non-career ladder teachers toward a pay model similar to the career ladder program, but not labeled as such, suggests a slight emotional bias against the career ladder label. Responses supported the current program's emphasis on student achievement and most teachers saw higher teacher salaries as the program's most valuable component. The program's organization and implementation were also regarded positively by career ladder tachers. Five tables and one figure illustrating survey results are included. (5 references) (LMI)

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TEACHER ATTITUDES TOWARD CAREER LADDER

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Teacher Attitudes Toward Career Ladder

Merit pay plans for teachers are documented as early as the beginning of this century with the first recorded merit pay plan being established in Newton, Massachusetts in 1908. Interest in this approach to teacher reimbursement continued, peaking in the 1920's and then declining in the 1930's as single salary schedules became nearly universal. Interest revived in the 1960s at which time nearly 10% of school districts had some kind of merit pay program. A 1978 study, however, found only 115 (4%) school districts nationwide which were using any kind of merit pay plans for teachers and 239 districts which had tried and subsequently abandoned these plans. By 1983, only 54 districts reported use or plans to use merit pay plans. For nearly nine decades the issues of merit pay have been endlessly debated and researched producing controversy and stress within the school systems.

Historically, teachers have opposed merit pay plans while the public has supported them (ERS, 1979; ERS, 1983; Robinson, 1984). This century is littered with abandoned efforts to implement incentive or merit pay programs and studies have been done to determine why some succeed and others fail. Successful merit pay programs have been generally found to exist in districts with a harmonious climate among teachers, administrators, and evaluators. In addition these plans have been flexible, financially sound and provide large enough incentives to motivate teachers. Successful districts provide strong, dynamic leadership and teacher and administrator input is is essential. Plans which have been imposed on teachers rarely are successful.

The primary reason cited for the failure of merit pay plans was teacher dissatisfaction with evaluation procedures. Districts found it difficult to determine who actually deserved extra pay, ratings were not seen as accurate, data was insufficient to support evaluations and instruments and evaluations were found to be subjective and unreliable. In addition, merit pay plans were cited as creating administrative problems and staff dissention, having cutoffs were artificial and restrictive, financial incentives inadequate, lacking teachers support, and inadequate in defining superior results (Robinson, 1984). A later study of Tennessee's Extended Contract Program found problems similar to those in the Robinson study. Teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of time and work involved in the projects, and that tensions and conflict resulted both within and across districts in the state as a result of the program. Local administration of the programs was cited as not a uniform process and inequities were present (Bellon, Bellon, Blank, Brian & Kershaw, 1989).

By mid-century, conventional wisdom had come to accept the idea that the only way to reimburse teachers was on the basis of educational attainment and longevity of service because teacher productivity cannot be measured objectively. This assumption virtually stalled implementation of merit pay plans until publication of A Nation at Risk (USDE, 1983) riveted national attention on the dual problems of declining student achievement and the growing shortage of competent teachers. With this national revival of interest in merit pay plans, districts began to seek avenues to improve student learning and to attract academically talented students to teaching careers. Approaches rewarding excellence in teaching with increased stature and pay began to appear as contingencies for legislative funding of educational programs. This increased funding was to be at least partially contingent upon demonstrating increased competence of teachers and added impetus to the

exploration of approaches to merit pay which had languished in obscurity for so long.

Arizona responded to the publication of A Nation at Risk with increased emphasis on the quality of education throughout the state. The Arizona Legislature enacted a 5 year Career Ladder Teacher Incentive Program (CLTIP) and appointed a Joint Legislative Committee to approve and monitor pilot programs to be established in 15 school districts throughout the state. Mesa Public Schools initially established a committee to make recommendations for participation in the CLTIP, and a program was designed and submitted for teacher approval. It was vigorously opposed and subsequently rejected in October of 1985. A 10-member committee, composed of seven educators recommended by the Mesa Education Association (MEA) and three principles was created and began working on a second proposal. The committee adopted the following criteria:

1. District teachers must be involved in development of the program.
2. Improved student achievement must be the primary goal.
3. Advancement on the ladder must reflect improve teaching skills and/or responsibilities.
4. Teacher selections should be based on clear, predetermined criteria, not limited by quotas.
5. Educators should be able to choose whether or not to apply for the career ladder program and to withdraw from it at any time.

This proposal was initially accepted by 61% of district teachers and submitted to the legislature for approval. The Legislature requested several changes and the district was given 30 days to rewrite the plan. This was accomplished and the revised plan was accepted by 59% of the district teachers and subsequently approved by the legislature in December of 1986. It was implemented immediately during the 1986-87 school year. The program has two levels: Resident and Career. The Resident Level contains two steps and the Career Level has three. For each level and each step, specific qualifications have been defined, based on teachers satisfactory demonstration of competence in the following three educator roles: instruction, management and counseling. Within each of these educator roles, the teacher must be able to demonstrate abilities to plan, implement and evaluate. At the Career Level, educators must also demonstrate the following advanced skills: ability to adapt and integrate and to innovate and lead (Mesa Public Schools, 1986). Each applicant for the Career Ladder program submits a portfolio containing evidence they meet the necessary qualifications. Portfolios are subsequently evaluated and eligible teachers placed at the appropriate career level.,

Each step of MPS Career Ladder plan has a specified salary. Teachers who qualify for a higher salary than that provided by the district's standard schedule receive an addendum to their contract for the difference. This is particularly rewarding for those in the first few years of teaching since they can receive professional salaries early in their careers. It is, however, problematic for veteran teachers who have received pay raises over the years. After 10-12 years, teachers may earn as much or more on the district salary schedule as that which would be paid for Career Ladder placement.

Although they receive no direct salary benefit, veteran teachers on career ladder are able to submit proposals for "Optional Extenders." These are activities or projects that extend beyond the school day or year which provide educators the opportunity to develop and implement projects for improving student learning, improving the total school program, improve curriculum or share expertise with colleagues. These proposals for optional extenders may be submitted by any Career Level teacher or by a Resident Level teacher if it is in conjunction with a Career Level teacher. Funding up to $2500 per funding cycle for 3 cycles per year is possible. We assume a large number of veteran teachers either do not recognize the benefit of the optional extender portion of the program or choose not to encumber themselves with additional workloads outside the normal school year or day.

Since many veteran teachers may identify little or no benefit to acceptance in the program, there is little incentive to apply for career ladder status except professional pride and these teachers tend to be less supportive of this program than younger teachers. This is not surprising since, with this structure, the program functions to provide equal pay for equal performance wherein talented younger teachers who are performing at levels commensurate with those of veteran teachers are compensated for this without waiting years to advance on the traditional salary scale.

Mesa Public Schools Career Ladder program is now entering its third year of implementation. Participation rates have increased steadily from 14% the first year to 17% the second, 25.7% the third year, and 42% of the teachers have applied for the 4th year, indicating growing interest in and acceptance of the program.

As we have seen, the primary reason for discontinuing merit pay programs has been teacher dissatisfaction. In an effort to evaluate the attitudes of teachers in the MPS Career Ladder program, a survey was designed to solicit teacher attitudes toward the concept of the Career Ladder program and also to evaluate the functioning of the program as it is currently administered.

Methodology

Survey questionnaires (Appendix 1) were sent by district mail to each school for distribution to 3239 Mesa Public School teachers and administrators. This total is composed of the following:

Non-career ladder teachers:	2641	
Career Ladder teachers:		495
Principals:		80
Directors:		16
Superintendents:		7
Total:		3239

Respondents either mailed individual survey forms to the district Research and Evaluation department or they were collected at the school and mailed in bulk to Research and Evaluation. A total of 1683 responses were returned for a 52% return rate. This return total is composed of the following:

Career Ladder teachers:	414 returned	(83.6% return rate)
Non-career ladder teachers:	1255 returned	(47.5% return rate)

The overall return rate and the return rate for non-career ladder teachers can be considered good and cautious generalization may be made. The return rate from career ladder teachers is excellent and is possibly representative of that overall group. Other demographic information on the returned responses can be seen in Table 1. No specific data were collected on the schools in which respondents taught.

TABLE 1.
DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS

Category	Total responses	% responses
Grade Taught		
K-3:	465	28.2
4-6:	307	18.6
7-9:	371	22.5
10-12:	304	18.4
Other:	204	12.4
Missing:	32	
Type Class:		
Regular Classroom:	1229	73.8
Special Education:	196	11.8
School-based Specialist:	132	7.9
District-based Specialist:	62	3.7
Principal, other Adminis:	46	2.8
Missing:	18	
Career Ladder Status:		
Career Ladder:	414	24.8
Non-career Ladder:	1255	75.2
Missing:	14	
Years Experience:		
0-1:	62	3.7
2-4:	237	14.1
5-9:	390	23.3
10-19:	727	43.2
20 or more:	259	15.5
Missing:	8	

Results

Survey questions can effectively be categorized into 5 parts and will presented in that manner in this section. These parts are as follows:

1. Demographic data and opinions on program continuation. Answered by all respondents.
2. Attitudinal questions relating to methods of teacher compensation. Answered by all respondents.
3. General attitudinal questions relating to the Mesa Public Schools Career Ladder program. Answered by all respondents.

4. Specific attitudinal questions relating to the administration and career ladder process. Answered by Career Ladder respondents only.
5. Open-ended questions relating to likes and dislikes of the program. Answered by all respondents.

Demographic Data and Program Continuation.

Demographic data relating to descriptions of the respondents has been previously seen in Table 1. In addition to demographic data found in this Table, we elicited opinions on whether the MPS Career Ladder Program should be continued. Positive responses were received from 884 (54.2%) respondents and negative responses were received from 748 (45.8%) respondents with 51 not responding to this question. Responses to this question were analyzed on the basis of demographics. These data are seen in Table 2.

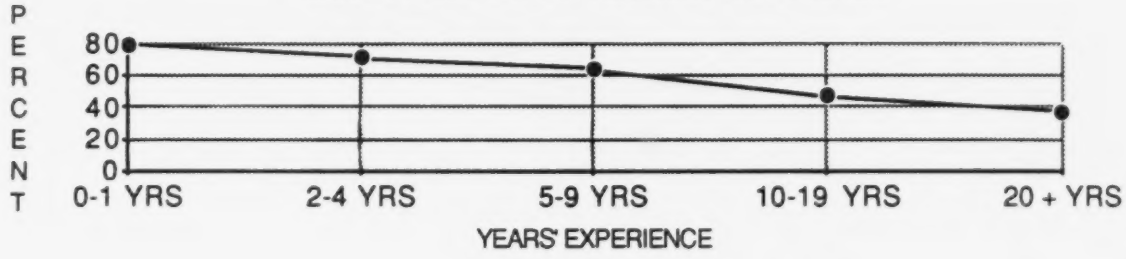
TABLE 2.
THE CAREER LADDER PROGRAM SHOULD BE CONTINUED.

Category:	% Yes	% No
Grade Taught:		
K-3:	51.5	48.5
4-6:	56.7	43.3
7-9:	56.1	43.9
10-12:	44.1	55.9
Other:	69.5	30.5
Type Class:		
Regular Classroom:	49.7	50.3
Special Education:	68.8	31.2
School-based Specialist:	58.5	41.5
District-based Specialist:	75.4	24.6
Principal/Administrator:	75.6	24.4
Career Ladder Status:		
Career Ladder:	86.4	13.6
Non-career Ladder:	43.5	56.5
Years Experience:		
0-1:	80.0	20.0
2-4:	71.5	28.5
5-9:	64.1	35.9
10-19:	47.3	52.7
20 or more:	36.9	63.1

Responses indicated that 54.2% of teachers believe the CL program should continue reflecting only slight erosion of support in the intervening 2 years of program implementation. Strongest support (51.5 to 56.7%) for CL was found among teachers

in lower grades (K-9) and among school-based specialists (58.5%), district-based specialists (75.4%) and principals and other administrators (75.6%). Teachers on the CL program indicated strong support for continuing the program (84.6%), and less than a majority of those not on the program indicated support (43.5%) While there may be a hard core group of CL opponents, many teachers who are currently not on career ladder apparently support the concept. This may be that they will qualify at some time in the future for inclusion or they recognize and support positive aspects of the program. Not surprisingly, as experience increased, support for the CL program decreased (Figure 1).

Figure 1: PERCENTAGE SUPPORTING CAREER LADDER BY TEACHER EXPERIENCE



A problem with the survey approach to the collection of data is that there is always a proportion of people who do not respond to the survey and we do not have their opinions. Most researchers agree that people with the strongest feelings or opinions are the ones most likely to return the survey. Therefore, the non-respondents are likely to be people who do not hold strong feelings one way or another or are those who are undecided. In the present survey, if we assume the returned responses represent the strongest feelings and opinions, we could obtain an estimate of probable bottom-line levels of support or non-support for the Career Ladder plan by assuming that all respondents would have replied in the same proportions as the actual respondents replied. We had 84 non-respondent Career Ladder teachers and 1431 non-respondents who were not on career ladder. Allocating the same proportions of positive and negative responses to our question on whether the career ladder program should be continued, from the responses of the two groups, we find that had all possible responses been returned, 50.3% would have supported continuation and 49.7% would not. We believe this to be the lowest level of overall teacher support, with a high probability that the actual level is somewhat higher.

Teacher Compensation Plans.

We examined approaches to teacher compensation by presenting 4 methods and asking teachers to indicate their thinking about each method individually. Compensation methods presented were:

- Equal pay for equal performance on the job.
  - *Pay is performance based and ignores, for the most part, longevity and/or advanced education.
- Traditional salary schedule (based on experience and education).
  - *Pay is based on years in the school system and advanced degrees and/or additional education.
- Performance-based differential pay (Arizona Career Ladder Model).
  - *Pay is performance based and ignores, for the most part, longevity

and/or advanced education.

•Traditional salary schedule + stipends (based on additional tasks performed beyond the school day.)

*Pay is based on the longevity, advanced degrees or education and on additional tasks performed beyond the school day or year.

*Definitions are added for clarity and did not appear in original questionnaire.

We began by tabulating the total responses to each item and then we examined the cross-tabulation of responses within each category to the question of whether the respondent thought the career ladder should or should not be continued. Table 3 presents the percentage of teachers selecting each alternative and then further examines the breakdown of those categorical responses according to support for the continuation of the career ladder program.

Table 3. Teacher Compensation Plans Broken Down By Expressed Support for the Career Ladder Program

Equal pay for equal performance

	strongly agree	agree	no knowledge	disagree	strongly disagree
Total:	29.6	31.0	20.5	12.4	6.6
Continue CL program*	56.8	57.8	57.4	49.2	30.5
Do not continue CL program	43.2	42.2	42.6	50.8	69.5

Traditional salary schedule

	strongly agree	agree	no knowledge	disagree	strongly disagree
Total:	25.8	35.8	26.9	8.8	2.7
Continue CL program*	28.2	52.1	72.0	76.3	82.2
Do not continue CL program	71.8	47.9	28.0	23.7	17.8

Performance-based differential pay (Arizona Career Ladder Model)

	strongly agree	agree	no knowledge	disagree	strongly disagree
Total:	16.2	24.6	18.2	19.5	21.5
Continue CL program*	96.6	92.9	63.5	14.3	6.6
Do not continue CL program	3.4	7.1	36.5	85.7	93.4

Traditional salary schedule + stipends

	strongly agree	agree	no knowledge	disagree	strongly disagree
Total:	32.0	32.6	18.0	8.7	7.2
Continue CL program*	46.3	59.2	58.4	61.6	46.6
Do not continue CL program	53.7	40.8	41.6	38.4	53.4

*See page 8: 54.2% continue Career Ladder Program.
45.8% do not continue Career Ladder Program.

It is interesting to note here that no compensation plan received an overwhelming amount of support from teachers in general. If we collapse our scale into just "agree" and "disagree" categories, Equal Pay and Traditional receive approximately equivalent support 61.6% seeing Traditional as agreeable and 60.6% seeing Equal Pay

in a positive light. Traditional Salary plus Stipends receives slightly more support with 64.6% agreeing with this approach. The Career Ladder Model splits support and non-support nearly evenly with 40.8% agreeing and 41% disagreeing with this compensation plan. The Career Ladder model is similar in many ways to an "equal pay for equal job performance" concept. Yet we see wide discrepancies in teacher responses to these two labels with nearly 61% of teachers favorably rating the Equal Pay concept as agreeable while only 40.8% of teachers rated the Career Ladder model as such. This seems to indicate substantial emotional content to the "Career Ladder" label, decreasing support, while the similar concept of Equal Pay does not carry this emotional baggage and genders considerable support. This emotional content could be an important administrative consideration in presentation and implementation of differential-based pay programs.

To further examine this paradox, compensation methods were cross-tabbed with responses to the previous question on whether the CL program should be continued (Table 3). Here again we see a fairly equal distribution of responses for the concept of equal pay for equal performance on the job and for the Traditional Salary schedule plus stipends from both those teachers supporting continuation of career ladder and those not supporting it. However, we again see the paradox of teachers who do not believe the career ladder program should continue describing the equal pay concept favorably nearly as often a teachers who support career ladder continuation. It is when we examine the traditional salary schedule and the performance-based differential pay that we see remarkable differences. Teachers who do not believe career ladder should continue overwhelmingly describe the traditional salary schedule in positive terms and the Arizona Career Ladder Model in negative terms while those supporting continuation of career ladder describe them overwhelmingly in the opposite directions. It is obvious that what we are seeing is a deep division within the ranks of educators. Given that support for career ladder is greatest among teachers in K-9 and administrators and that as experience increases, support for CL decreases, we can see that on one side of the division are veteran high school teachers and on the other are younger grade school teachers.

Overall Teacher Attitudes Toward Career Ladder Program.

The third area we examined was general teacher attitudes toward the career ladder program. All teachers, both career ladder and non-career ladder teachers, responded to this section of the questionnaire. Items in this section related broadly to teachers themselves, the school climate and students. A breakdown of responses to these questions can be seen in Table 4. Responses in the strongly agree/strongly disagree categories have been collapsed into the agree/disagree categories for the sake of clarity.

Table 4: Teacher Attitudes
Toward the Career-Ladder Program:
Responses Broken down by Career Ladder Status.

QUESTION		Agree	No Knowledge	Disagree
I like the emphasis on student achievement in the Career Ladder program.	Total:	55.8	17.4	26.8
	CL:	79.2	1.7	19.1
	NCL:	48.0	22.6	29.4
I believe the primary purpose of the CL program is to attract, motivate and retain excellent teachers.	Total:	51.9	7.0	41.1
	CL:	78.8	2.2	19.0
	NCL:	42.9	8.6	48.5
I believe the MPS Career Ladder program is positively affecting school climate.	Total:	24.6	22.4	53.0
	CL:	51.1	16.3	32.4
	NCL:	15.7	24.4	59.9
I believe the CL program makes teachers feel better about themselves.	Total:	32.6	23.6	43.9
	CL:	65.2	9.2	25.5
	NCL:	21.7	28.3	50.0
I have seen evidence that the CL program has resulted in some teachers engaging in unethical practices to assure placement.	Total:	28.2	50.5	21.3
	CL:	19.5	40.6	39.9
	NCL:	31.2	53.8	15.1
I like the option extenders which provide educators an opportunity to decide whether to participate in activities beyond normal classroom responsibilities.	Total:	55.0	25.7	19.3
	CL:	82.9	7.6	9.5
	NCL:	45.7	31.8	22.5
I believe the Career Ladder program promotes divisiveness among educators.	Total:	47.1	28.0	24.9
	CL:	34.4	23.1	42.5
	NCL:	51.3	29.6	19.1
I believe the Career Ladder program is providing teachers with a career path that enables them to stay in the class room.	Total:	40.7	21.3	38.1
	CL:	70.8	11.2	18.0
	NCL:	30.6	24.6	44.8
I believe the Career Ladder program has increased collegiality among educators.	Total:	25.1	23.5	51.4
	CL:	55.0	12.7	32.4
	NCL:	15.1	27.1	57.8
I believe the most valuable component of the Career Ladder program is higher salaries for teachers.	Total:	72.9	9.7	17.4
	CL:	85.5	1.5	13.0
	NCL:	68.6	12.5	18.9

When we examine the above responses we find the majority of teachers approving of the emphasis on student achievement and we find a higher degree of agreement (72.9%) that the most valuable component of the CL program is that of higher salaries for teachers. A majority (51.9%) of teachers agree that the primary purpose of the program is to attract, retain and motivate excellent teachers. We were also interested in the large number of teachers who either have no knowledge (50.5%) of unethical practices or who disagree (21.3%) that this occurs. From time to time, complaints of this nature have surfaced and these results belie any wholesale problem within the program. That is not to say that unethical practices do not exist, as evidenced by 28.2% of respondents who indicate they have seen evidence that it does happen. Certainly steps should be taken to minimize unethical practices.

Signed statements of ethical behavior, appropriate penalties and random audits might be considered.

The majority (53%) of teachers do not see a positive effect on school climate from the CL program nor do they believe it has increased collegiality among educators (51.4%). That is not to say, of course, that it has a negative effect or has decreased collegiality. To clarify this, we asked if teachers believed the program promoted divisiveness among educators. Nearly half (47.1%) of the respondents indicated they believed it did while 32.6% believed that the program made teachers feel better about themselves. Responses to these four questions seem to indicate that a sizable number of teachers see the Career Ladder Program having a negative effect on teachers themselves, apparently producing some disagreement. Some of this disagreement can certainly be attributed to the disparity of reward we have previously seen in relation to veteran teachers. There is also undoubtedly a component of personal anxiety in a performance-based merit system. Plainly stated, there are some teachers who justifiably fear they may not receive rewards under this plan. Another factor here may be that in any new program, there is a period of backing and filling as policies and procedures are clarified and refined. Small groups tend to initially either resist the change or distance themselves from it with a wait-and-see attitude. This maybe the case with the current state of the career ladder program. In any event there is some perception among respondents that the program is having a negative effect on collegiality, cohesiveness and school climate.

When we breakdown these same responses into those from teachers on career ladder and those not, we find an obvious polarization. A majority (51.1%) of career ladder teachers see the program having a positive effect on school climate, collegiality (55%), and teacher image (65.2%). While a majority of non-career ladder teachers disagree with these categories: climate (59.9%), collegiality (57.8%), teacher image (50.0%). The one area where this polarization is somewhat mitigated is that of Career Ladder promoting divisiveness. The majority of non-career ladder teachers (51.3%) and 34.4% of Career Ladder teachers describe the program as divisive.

Participant Attitudes Toward Career Ladder Program.

The fourth area we addressed with the survey was that of attitudes of teachers who are currently placed on career ladder toward the program. Only career ladder teachers answered this section. Questions asked and the breakdown of responses can be seen in Table 5. Again, we collapsed responses within agree/disagree categories for the sake of clarity.

Table 5. Career Ladder Teacher Attitudes
Toward the Career Ladder Program
(Career Ladder Teachers Only)

	Agree	No Knowledge	Disagree
Basic educator and advanced level skills evaluation items are descriptive of good teaching	82.2	4.8	13.1
My administrator evaluates Career Ladder teachers fairly.	83.4	10.3	6.3
The verification of the student achievement process is a valuable part of the Career Ladder program.	77.8	4.3	17.9
The portfolio has helped me focus on important aspects of my professional responsibilities.	64.0	12.1	23.9
The career ladder portfolio is evaluated fairly.	54.5	28.5	17.0
The portfolio process evaluate writing skills rather than assessing quality of educational activities or advanced teaching skills.	56.3	18.4	25.3
The optional extender opportunities allow teachers to design and participate in programs which help students and colleagues.	80.5	12.7	6.8
My career ladder liaison is doing a good job.	89.2	4.9	5.9

There appears to be overall satisfaction among Career Ladder teachers with the program and the manner in which it is administered. Particularly favorable responses were seen in questions relating to the Liaisons, optional extenders, verification of student achievement, program administration and evaluation items. This is encouraging since much of the dissatisfaction resulting in abandonment of career ladder programs has centered on program administration and evaluation. The questions with the lowest levels of support all related to the portfolio. While support even here is high, it would appear that improvements could be made to increase satisfaction.

Summary of Qualitative Responses.

Since questionnaires can reflect the thinking and biases of their creator, we included a final, fifth section of open-ended questions to ensure that respondent input could vary from the structured questionnaire. Two questions were asked: "What is the best thing about the Career Ladder Program" and "What is the worst

thing about it." Respondents were free to give as many or as few responses as they desired to each question and each response was categorized and tabulated. We also included a section simply labeled "Comments." Responses in this section were also categorized and subsequently sorted into "best" and "worst" categories where this was possible.

In response to the query regarding the best thing about the Career Ladder program, the overwhelming majority of responses (n=699) indicated that the best thing about the program was the increased money available for teacher salaries. Many of these responses were further modified by qualifiers specifying "for younger teachers" (280 of 699) or for "some" (40 of 699) teachers. Examples of typical responses in this category are:

> "Younger teachers are allowed to make more money quickly."
>
> "The money! As a science teacher ...I could make a much better salary in private industry; but career ladder keeps me in education, & in MPS."
>
> "Finally it has made me feel that I am a professional getting paid appropriately for a job well-done!"
>
> "Affords teachers the opportunity to make an adequate income without becoming an administrator."
>
> "More money for 'some' teachers."
>
> "Younger teachers are allowed to make more money quickly."
>
> "It allows teachers the opportunity to make a salary that will allow them to stay in the teaching profession without starving...".

The second most cited category of responses we labeled "teacher skills" (n=135). These responses related to the theme of Career Ladder making teachers more aware of their skills and encouraging them to work harder on these skills. A sample of responses in this category is presented below:

> "Quality programs & instructional techniques are being identified and shared."
>
> "It has helped me refine, improve and reflect on what and how I teach. I am doing a much better job as a result of this organizing and thinking."
>
> "Many activities require in the portfolio focus on ... elements of good instruction and what paper documentation exist that indicates the teachers abilities."
>
> "...some of the writing is definitely beneficial to understanding what it is we are accomplishing."
>
> "Helps me to focus on improving professionally."
>
> "...causes me to perform valuable self-examination. ' It is a product that increases self-esteem as well."

The third set of responses related to student growth (n=57). These responses described evaluation of student achievement as one of the best things about career ladder. Typical responses in this category were:

> "Emphasizes 'how does this activity positively impact on your students'."
>
> "Student achievement is scary! It has made me more aware of teaching to my objectives throughout the semester!"
>
> "Focus on student achievement".
>
> "The long range effect career ladder educators will have on MPS children's achievement and exposure to creative teaching."
>
> "Verification of student achievement encourages thoughtful, creative focus on objectives and measurement."

The fourth most often cited category (n=40) related to multiple opportunities made available to teachers through the Career Ladder program. Typical responses in this "opportunities" category were:

> "Optional extenders are great opportunities to do the things that need to be done."
>
> "It gives those who choose to accept greater responsibility...the opportunity to participate."
>
> 'It gives us a chance to look for areas of growth and plans to be developed and to help in these needed areas."

While less often cited, other teachers believed the Career Ladder program was: positive in its ability to retain quality teachers (cited by 22); gave teachers the choice to join or not (cited by 23); encouraged teachers to work together and share more with each other (cited by 19); and enhanced by the ability of the Career Ladder staff members (cited by 17).

In spite of the fact that we asked open-ended questions relating to both the "best" and the "worst" thing about the Career Ladder program, a number of teachers took the opportunity to express negative comments about the program under the heading of "best things". Comments here were typically that "nothing" was best about the program or that it should be done "away with". Many of these comments were overtly hostile and a small number of them were frankly obscene.

When we asked, "What is the worst thing about the Career Ladder program", the most often cited complaint was that of paperwork (n=486). The time needed to complete the portfolio and the student achievement plan were seen as excessive and a few responses complained that teachers used class time to do this paper work. Typical responses in this category are as follows:

> "The portfolio is heavy on paper documentation of all activities...".
>
> "The paperwork to qualify seems to be very time consuming."

"Increased paperwork that takes away time spent on activities for kids."

"Too much time to document".

"...the paperwork is discouraging."

"...the paperwork--but I feel it is necessary."

The second most often cited problem with Career Ladder in the open-ended responses could be categorized as an evaluation problem in that teachers felt that evaluation was more based in the ability to write than on the ability to teach (n=228). Typical responses in this category are:

"Much depends on how well a teacher is able to put ideas on paper..."

"...just writers, often poor teachers, are the ones rewarded."

"The process weighs heavily on writing skills.... I can't think of a more objective procedure through."

"A teacher trained in writing will do a better job of filling out the paperwork, but not necessarily in the classroom."

"Teachers should be paid for the job they <u>are doing</u> (emphasis in original) and not for effective documentation and writing skills."

Many teachers also cited contention and competitiveness as a negative with the Career Ladder program (n=198). Typical responses from this group are:

"Promotes some ill feelings between those who are motivated and those who want to continue along old ways."

"It is very divisive. There is hard feeling brought about by the fact those on career ladder are not doing a better job in the classroom than other teachers...."

"Causes divisiveness among teachers...has divided the 'ins' from the 'outs'."

"Teachers not in the program now feel why should they bother with extra duties--many feel 'let the career ladder people do it'."

The fourth most often cited category complained that older teacher did not derive any benefit from the program (n=163). Typical responses in this area were:

"Financially unfair for teachers with several years experience and additional education to be penalized...".

"It does not provide incentive for teacher with more years experience."

"...I am not on career ladder but the teacher next to me with ... 1/2 of my experience (!) and no master's degree is making as much money as me...".

"...teachers with advanced degrees cannot receive the same salary increase as a younger teacher because of the salary cap at each level."

Other negative categories, less often cited, related to: poor evaluation procedures including administrative differences (n=87); cheating and unethical behavior of teachers (n=73); being forced to "play the game" to be accepted on Career Ladder (n=55); confusion in the Career Ladder application process (n=39); not all teachers can apply, e.g. counselors (n=37); and increased teacher stress (n=24).

In addition to the above cited categories we found several isolated responses in "worst" area which were difficult to categorize. Many of these were overtly hostile and again some were obscene. Overall, content appeared to be overtly angry and hostile. These statements were for the most part, very brief, and could be characterized as sloganeering. Examples of some of the negative uncategorizable statements are:

"This is the worst thing to happen to Mesa!"

"They lost the boat!"

"Trash it!"

"It is a slap in the face!"

"Unethical and immoral rape of the school system!"

"Teachers are prostituting themselves for a buck!"

"...state money placed here can't help school districts overall school budget."

"The career latter (sic) stinks and needs to be abandoned."

There were also uncategorizable comments which were more positive in tone. Overall these statements tended to be somewhat longer than the negative statements we did not categorize. They tended to be more thoughtful and lacked the quality of sloganeering. Some examples of these positive statements which we did not categorize are:

"I'm enjoying the whole process.... It is the first time I sat down and wrote what I have done and I say WOW! (emphasis in original).

"This program is very valuable for attracting and retaining excellent teachers. We need to continue to grow."

"Excellent program for veteran teachers who have come to Mesa from out-of-state and who have taken salary cuts as large as 30%."

"...an excellent program for teachers who may have thought about leaving education."

"...a sense of pride and accomplishment goes along whenever I show my portfolio."

"Please don't let it stop!!" (emphasis in original).

"I'm excited to be in a district that has a career ladder program. It is stimulating!"

"The career ladder office has done an excellent job making information accessible to everyone. They are a positive group of people who look for success (emphasis in original) in applicants."

"Many individuals...have made judgements based on misinformation or lack of information! These people have caused...new teachers to not "check it (the program) out! Then when the new teachers find out the true information, from a (career ladder) participant, they're angry about missing deadlines, opportunities, etc.!"

When we examine the responses to our open-ended questions we believe that the original questionnaire addressed primary concerns adequately. We will use these open-ended questions as a basis for future questionnaires.

Summary

In summary, we found that the majority of teachers supported continuation of the career ladder program with strongest support from teachers in K-9 and among school and district-based specialist and administrators. Teachers who were currently placed on career ladder supported it overwhelmingly. As experience increased, support for career ladder decreased. When teachers were presented with 4 compensation methods, there was no consensus on which might be preferable. Teachers who supported career ladder tended to support the career ladder method and teachers who did not support career ladder tended to support the traditional approach. A pay model very similar to the career ladder approach but not labeled as such received approximately equal support from both career ladder and non-career ladder teachers with a slight majority of non-career ladder teachers approving it, indicating some possible emotional content to the "Career Ladder" label itself.

In addressing the current career ladder program specifically, responses supported the emphasis on student achievement and most teachers saw higher salaries as the most valuable component of the program. Teachers who are currently on career ladder appear to be satisfied with the program and manner in which it is administered. Open-ended questions did not reveal any unique information that was of interest to a large number of teachers that had not been addressed in the questionnaire but will serve as a basis for future inquiry.

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